BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Bertha Dunson

It just sort of happened. I came over here for eighteen months. See, that was supposed to be the deal with the government, eighteen months or until the duration of war [World War II]. And after the war was over, we could have gone back. The government would have sent us back, but by that time, I guess we had decided to stay here. My husband wanted to stay here and so quite naturally, I did too. And the government would send us back every two years. We could go back on the government, all expenses paid, and visit our families and friends, and up until we retired and then the contract was over. See, we came over on contract.

Bertha Dunson, daughter of Ben Elliott and Kate Trueblood Elliott, was born March 8, 1918 in New Orleans. Less than two months after her birth, her mother was widowed. Her mother did domestic work and was also employed at Rudder Seafood Factory. Her mother later remarried.

Dunson and her husband Nathaniel arrived in Hawai'i during World War II. They were civilian workers for the U.S. military. They eventually made their home in Wai'anae.

Dunson was employed as a technical section librarian at Barber's Point. She retired in 1976.

She is a charter member of both the Eastern Star and Wai Wai Nui.

Tape No. 18-7-1-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

With

Bertha Dunson (BD)

May 6, 1988

Wai'anae Coast, O'ahu

BY: Kathryn Takara (KT)

KT: [We are in Nānākuli] in the living room of Bertha Dunson and her husband. And it is May 6, 1988. Okay, so here we go. It's a rainy day in May, surprise for the Wai'anae Coast. And we're going to talk a little bit about your childhood first. You said you were born in New Orleans, is that correct?

BD: New Orleans, Louisiana [on March 8, 1918].

KT: Uh huh [yes]. And what was it like in New Orleans in those years?

BD: Oh, well, . . .

KT: What was your neighborhood like?

BD: My neighborhood was very nice. We were in an integrated neighborhood. In fact, we were about the fifth Black couple [i.e., family] that lived in this particular neighborhood. And it was at 1325 Caffin Avenue, in the Ninth Ward. And I had a pretty normal childhood. I didn't have a father, of course, I never knew my father [Ben Elliott] because my father died when I was a month and twenty-eight days old, so my mother [Kate Trueblood Elliott who later married a Mr. Brooks] told me. And she had to work very hard to take care of three kids.

And then after we got out of high school, my sister [Laura Ann Green] and I both went to work, and we landed jobs in Rex Manufacturing Company, which manufactured clothing, men's shirts and pants. And they manufactured all the shirts and pants for the army. And we, you know, ran the high-powered machines to sew these garments up. No one person made a whole garment. They had a certain thing. Some people did the cuff. Some people put the sleeve in. The others run the seam up. And the others did the hemming. Then they had girls to trim. What they call taking all the threads off. And then [they] send it to the person for putting the buttons on. Then it went to the next girl to put [in] the buttonholes. So no one person did a whole garment. It just went, it was in a cycle, you know, everybody was passed on.

KT: Assembly line kind of.

BD: Yes. And the men did all the cutting. They had the patterns, and they cut out the material. And we sewed, the women sewed them. And then after, my husband [Nathaniel Dunson] came over here [Hawai'i] in 1942. And he was over here two years before I came. I came in 1944. And that was the reason why I came to Hawai'i, is because of him. After he spent two years over here, the men begin to want to go back home to their families. And the governor didn't want them to go back, so they start bringing the women over here in 1943. But I didn't get over here until '44.

KT: Wait, before we jump that far ahead, tell me a little bit more--you speak of the integrated neighborhood, that was you and your husband that lived in that neighborhood?

BD: No, childhood.

KT: That was your childhood?

BD: Childhood days, yes. Uh huh.

KT: Okay. Now, what kind of work did your mom do, and what did you do while she was at work?

BD: Well, we took care [of] the house and we went to school. And when we came home we took care of the house and when we was old enough, we cooked the food for her when she got home. But she did domestic work for quite some time.

KT: Which was typical at that period for a Black woman?

BD: Uh huh, and then she went to Rudder Seafood Factory after then and worked in the seafood factory which was making much more money than domestic work.

KT: Excuse me. I grew up in Alabama, and at that period of time, in the particular community that I grew up, it was totally segregated. Everything was segregated. So it is interesting, I've always heard interesting things about New Orleans, and Louisiana in terms of being a little bit different than the typical South. Can you talk a little bit about that?

BD: Oh, yes. In my neighborhood, [to] every person that was the head of the house, you [children] said "Mr. and Mrs." That's like husband and wife, "Mr. and Mrs." My aunt and my mother, my mother was Mrs. Brooks and my aunt was Mrs. Perkins and her husband was Mr. Perkins. My mother didn't have a husband so it wasn't Mr. anybody in her household. But all the kids that these White people had--we didn't call them Haoles then, we called them White--and that they had were called by the names. Where in other Southern cities, I heard that as soon as they get five years old, you had to say "Mr. and Mrs." But we didn't do that, and until today, it's that way. You call

them by their name, but they do respect the head of the house to say "Mr. and Mrs.," regardless to what color they are.

KT: That's wonderful.

BD: But our schools were segregated, our eating counters were segregated, and the bus [was] segregated. Everything was segregated but the neighborhoods. They lived in different neighborhoods, and we had a section there that nothing but Creoles lived in. Well, I moved into that section at one time, my husband and I. But they had Creoles and they looked White, and some of them looked Black and brown. There were all colors. And the ones that was real fair, and blue eyes and blonde hair, they went over on the other side [White world] for better jobs. We didn't look down on them for that because they got air-conditioned office where they could put secretaries and what have you, where if they had to say they were Black, they never would have got the jobs. And so we could understand that and we dealt with it very nicely.

KT: And they would continue to live in their regular neighborhood . . .

BD: Oh, yes.

KT: . . . and have . . .

BD: Yes.

KT: . . . people of all different colors in their family and this and that.

BD: Right, right.

KT: But just when it came to the work situation . . .

BD: Yes.

KT: . . . they might go over to the other side. [Pass for White, cross the color line.]

BD: And when you had to put down what nationality you was, quite natural, they would go over on the other side in order to get better jobs. And the people that was in the neighborhood didn't resent it because it was a better step for them.

KT: It was survival.

BD: Uh huh. It was a survival. Where the rest of us had to put down, like me, I had to put down--at that time they was using the word "Negro."

KT: But you have blue eyes . . .

BD: They weren't saying "Black." Huh?

KT: You have blue eyes.

(Laughter)

BD: Well, that doesn't count.

KT: Well, for people that don't know, maybe you can speak a little about Creoles. What is a Creole?

BD: It's a mixture of all different nationalities. It's of Caucasian, of Black, and Spanish, and French. It's all jambalized up, but anyway, you'll find a Creole as White as they come and you'll find them as Black as they come but they are very, very free, (much) Creoles.

KT: But what would distinguish a Creole from, say, just a Black who happens to be light-skinned? Was it a cultural difference or language or . . .

BD: Yeah, they, yes. It's a language that they speak, just like the French and the Italians, and what have you. They have their own language that they speak, mm hmm, yes.

KT: I see. But is it like just an English dialect, or is it just a foreign language that you couldn't understand it?

BD: Well, I didn't understand Creole.

KT: I see.

BD: I picked up on a few words here and there.

KT: I see, so it's totally . . .

BD: But I could not understand Creole. I have a friend here that is Creole and he's very dark, but when he speak Creole, I can't understand it.

KT: Would they also have different food and different, say, traditions?

BD: Now that I don't know because we all ate about the same food, I guess.

KT: And what did you eat?

BD: Well, I ate from beans and cabbage, and pork chops and beef, and stew and rice, and fish. On Fridays, that was fish day for everybody, regardless to whether they were Catholic or not. That's a New Orleans tradition. That fish on Friday, you must have fish, cooked fish in your house. And so, most people do. I think the young generation now is getting away from that. But, in the old

generation, you had to have your fish in the house regardless to whatever else you had. You had to have that fish dish. And potatoes, and what have you, beans and ham hock.

KT: Would you say that if you had left New Orleans and gone to live in New York or Hawai'i, that you would have noticed a difference in the food from what you ate growing up . . . ?

BD: Yes.

KT: . . . what you would eat.

BD: Oh, I'm sure I would because I'm sure those states have different ways, like some states, for their rice, they eat it as a cereal and we don't. We cook ours dry, and they had theirs with milk and sugar on it. But when I came here, the food was very different and very hard for me to get used to. And we [my husband and I] had an awful time with food, because all our food came from the Mainland. We were, at that time, shopping at the commissary, which was military. And we got that food when the boats came in. If no boats came in, that food didn't come in.

It was hard to go to the stores and buy different stuff because you would ask, say, you'd go to the store and ask for okra. They had a different name for it. "Oh, we don't have that," and then you'd look up there and you see it in the can, you (would) say, "That's what I want." They tell you in Hawaiian, a Hawaiian word that they use for okra. And it was kind of difficult for that and the stores didn't have very much [supplies] in [them]. Like, it wasn't no such thing as buying furniture when (I) got here. And there wasn't any such thing as having a telephone or washing machine or anything like that. My husband had his furniture made.

KT: That was because of the war?

BD: You couldn't send any furniture in here (because) the stores (didn't have any furniture). And I remember standing in (a) line all day long to try to get a pair of nylons. When I got up there, they were sold out. The shipment would come in, and they'd advertise it and this was at Kress Store, (where) I stood in line, I have pictures around here somewhere. And then when I got up there, it wasn't no nylons. And the stores downtown didn't have very much to offer in the line of clothing and the sizing for you to wear. Because when I came here, I was wearing a size five shoe, weighing 109 pounds and then after I was here about six months, I was weighing about 118 pounds so I had nothing to wear. So I went to Sears Roebucks, and all I could find was two dresses. And I had to wash those dresses and change them around and that was all I had to wear. All the rest of my clothes was too small for me. Didn't have shoes to wear because my feet got big. (Laughs) But anyway, it wasn't much, Hawai'i wasn't much to look at, at that time. They had two hotels in Waikīkī at that time when I came here. And when I . . .

KT: What hotels were those?

BD: That was the Moana, at the Banyan Tree . . .

KT: Moana, yeah.

BD: . . . Moana Hotel and the Royal Hawaiian.

KT: Those were the only two?

BD: Those were the only two hotels there. Everything up in Waikīkī have come up since I've been here. And the Hawaiian Village where we were Saturday, I remember when Kaiser pumped all that sand (in) and it (is) man-made land.

KT: So it wasn't a state when you came? Hawai'i was not a state?

BD: Oh, no, it was a territory. It wasn't a state. This place never became a state until '59. That's when it became a state. But it was a territory and it was ran at that time, the territory was ran by the Big Five [Castle & Cooke, AmFac, Alexander & Baldwin, Theo H. Davies, C. Brewer & Co.].

KT: I see.

BD: And where the Ala Moana Shopping Center is, that was a big duck pond. (The business places was) built up since I've been here.

KT: When you say it was a big duck pond, does it mean that it was like a park where you could go and look at the ducks?

BD: They had a big old pond there where they had a lot of ducks and things swimming around in there.

KT: And then did they have picnic benches and things around it?

BD: No, I don't remember any picnic benches 'cause I never did go there, just saw it when I passed through there. But Waikīkī wasn't anything to write home about at that time because there wasn't anything out there.

KT: What did you miss most when you came here?

BD: Well, I missed my family most of all. And I did miss the food because, as I say, the food here, I was invited out to Hawaiian people's house out here and all this where I'm living now was sugarcane (fields). Wasn't any houses in here at all, all this was sugarcane. This was a sugarcane plantation.

KT: Wai'anae?

BD: Wai'anae Plantation sugarcane.

KT: I see, I see. And that was owned by whom? One of the Big Five or?

BD: I'm sure it was, I'm not sure (on) that . . .

KT: Which one.

BD: . . . which one it was owned by, but it was a plan[tation]--and it went broke in 1946 when they had the tidal wave here. See, the tidal wave hit Wai'anae side.

KT: Tell me about the tidal wave. Where were you?

BD: Oh, I was in CHA3 [Civilian Housing Area 3]. I wasn't out here then. I didn't live out here. I only came out here once in a while because we had friends out here living in old plantation homes. But I was in CHA2 [Civilian Housing Area 2] at that time, and [CHA]3, in '46. We moved to [CHA]3 in '46. But the tidal wave hit, and it hit Wai'anae side. And it did a lot of damage there. So the plantation went broke in 1946 and what they did, they eventually divided the lands into lots and start selling them. And the people that worked in the plantations that had the top jobs, they got the nicer homes. And the other workers got the older homes. And Chinn Ho, at that time, [he] bought all this land, Makaha Valley. Well, that's after they went broke, he bought that entire valley back then and developed it.

KT: So he was in a management position at that time?

BD: Evidentially, he was in a top job there.

KT: Yeah. So that he could afford, okay.

BD: Because I didn't know anything about how the plantation operated but this is what happened in 1946.

KT: I see.

BD: Uh huh [yes]. And then later on, they sold 'cause I happened to buy one of the homes that one of the supervisors was living in. He bought it, he and his family bought it. I imagine that money was very small, salaries at that time, because that whole family went in and bought this house. And then after they bought it, then the rest of the family begin to grumble and wanted their money out. So he sold it. And my friend in Wai'anae that (became my) next-door neighbor, we all called her "Ma Helen," she told us about this place and we bought it from him [the owner]. So he paid his family out and then he moved to Waipahu to work in the sugar mill there, and I imagine they purchased land in Waipahu, I don't know.

KT: How much did your house cost at that time?

BD: (Laughs) I got 8,700 and some square feet of land and it was $7,000 and something.

KT: That is just amazing.

BD: Seven thousand five-hundred or something like that.

KT: Oh. And it was fee simple?

BD: Fee simple.

KT: Oh, my.

BD: Still got the land.

KT: Oh, my goodness. (BD chuckles.) That's wonderful. Well then . . .

BD: Oh, they were selling lots out here in Wai'anae, up in the valley, for fifty dollars an acre.

KT: This was back in what year?

BD: This was back in the '50s.

KT: My goodness. Too bad I wasn't here then.

BD: (Chuckles) [Yes,] and if I could have foreseen things, I probably [would have] grabbed up a whole lot of land, but we weren't sure then whether we were going to stay here. We [were] undecided what was going to happen, but here we are. We're still stuck here. And love it.

KT: So not really stuck, stuck here, and love it. (BD laughs.) What about music? When you grew up, what kind of music did you listen to?

BD: Oh, we listened to most of the old records like Benny Goodman, and oh, I can't name all these people that, the music that I listened to then, but, oh, and oh, and what's his name that died, this Black guy that tooted the horn?

KT: Louis Armstrong?

BD: Louis Armstrong, and oh, music like that.

KT: Duke Ellington?

BD: And then--[yes,] Duke Ellington. And then New Orleans is known for its jazz, so we listened to a lot of that jazz and right down in the French Quarters there in New Orleans, well, that's where all the jazz is. And once in a while we were able to pass there and maybe hear the band playing, but we never participated in anything like that because my mother wasn't able to let us participate into anything like that. And I . . .

KT: Was it expensive during those days?

BD: Oh, no, it wasn't expensive, but I mean, the little money she had had to go towards taking care of us and paying rent and what have you, because we didn't own our own home at that time. My aunt owned hers, but my mother didn't own her home. And my mother did all the sewing for us. All our clothes was made by my mother. She would buy this material and make us little outfits, and I can remember when I had a pair of shoes for Sunday school and a pair of shoes to wear to school. And sometimes no shoes at all to wear to school, just those Sunday shoes. Spit on them and keep them shined up and keep going. (Laughs)

KT: And would you go to church? Was your mother a religious person?

BD: Oh, yes. She was a religious person. We had to go to Sunday school every Sunday. And we had to go to church every Sunday evening. And that was a must. We didn't say whether we wanted to go or not, we just got ready to go to church because Mama say we going to church and that was it. We all went to church.

KT: What kind of effect or what kind of a role did the church have, generally speaking, in the Black community during those days? Could you speak a little bit about that?

BD: Well, I think it had a deep impression on the community because everybody seems to went their separate ways. Like my mother, my mother was born a Methodist and she went to a Methodist church and then after she got married, she went to a Baptist church. So we had to go to a Baptist church. But the whole family didn't go to that one church. What I mean, like her sisters, then they had their own thing and she had her own church that she went to. And we went to that church that she went to. And the church did have a great effect on my life, I think, because, well, it taught me right from wrong, and so far so good, I have never did anything that I think I'm ashamed of.

KT: Well, that's . . .

BD: And even with my kids, I don't think I ever did anything in front of them that they could be ashamed of. And I have one daughter [Walter Bea Jackson], and I have three grandsons [Paris Nathaniel Dunson, Thomas Rico Jackson, Asein Lovell Jackson], and I adopted my oldest grandson. His name is Paris (N.), and he's a Dunson. But he has two brothers, which are Jackson. And I always taught him [BD's adopted grandson] that she loved him, but we just was in a position that we could do a little bit more for him and make him a little bit more comfortable. And that's why we had adopted him. And so every summer, I would send him to his mother to spend the summer with his two brothers. She was living in Los Angeles at that time.

KT: Would you say that Black families have been supportive in an extended kind of way that very often, because of need and because of love, that aunties and uncles and grandparents will, kind of like the Hawaiian system, take a child, maybe, that needs a little more

help or a little--I mean, would you say that that would be kind of typical in families growing up in your days or not in particular?

BD: Well, I always thought of my uncle [Bradford Trueblood]--he (is) my mother's baby brother, (he) just died a few years ago--he was the one that came to our rescue. And I always thought of him as dad, because he did take care of us, helped my mother take care of us. She worked, and his wife was just like a mother to us. And so, we had a---I had a good life, a good childhood life. I didn't have everything I wanted, probably nothing what I wanted, but I had everything I needed, like clothes and food and support of going to school and trying to get an education and things like that. And my uncle was very generous to us and he wasn't the type that would spank you. All he had to do was raise voice and that was whipping enough for me. (Laughs)

KT: Do you notice a difference nowadays in the way that children are brought up . . .

BD: Yes, I do.

KT: . . . and that which you experienced coming up?

BD: Yes, because, you see, my mother never lied to me that she was going to give me a spanking. And she never had to scream and holler at me. I could be in church doing something wrong and all she had to do is look around and I'd catch her eyes and that was it. See, I knew to stop whatever I was doing. And if she told me she was going to give me a spanking, she might not do it right then, but the minute I'd do something that ticked her off, if she gave me a spanking she'd spank me, she'd say, "This is what you did the other day," bam, bam, bam. "This is what you did yesterday," bam, bam, bam, and "This is for right now," bam, bam, bam. She made it a point that she would never lie to us.

And my mother, I've never known her to drink or smoke or anything. She was just a good Christian. And she's ninety years old. She made ninety years old on the 28th of March. And she's doing her own cooking, she's still getting around, and I call her and she sounds like, well, she just sounds like the picture of health. Course, a few years ago, she had a major heart attack. And they had pronounced her dead. And the doctor came in and found her pulse and put that thing on her, you know, and she came back to life. And she's still going strong. And the doctor tells her all the time when she goes back for a visit, he says, "Mrs. Brooks, you are made out of the first good Rolls Royce. They don't make material out of this anymore." (Laughs)

KT: Oh, isn't that a wonderful compliment. Isn't that just wonderful.

BD: So, I had a happy childhood life. I had a brother and a sister and we got along very fine. I lost my brother about ten, fifteen years ago, but we got along real fine. My sister and I are very close.

We call each other at least three times a month.

KT: Oh, good. Well, what about, wait now, what was I going to say? The influence of your grandparents on you?

BD: Oh, I didn't know my grandfather, but I did know my grandmother [Julia Trueblood].

KT: Your mother's mother?

BD: Uh huh [yes]. And I knew my dad's father, but I didn't know my dad's mother. My dad's mother died before I could remember and my grandfather on my mother's side died before I could remember. And my grandmother was a very loving person, and she was a steward, or a mother in a church, and her life was very--she lived with her youngest son, the son I say took care of her, took care of us. And his name was Bradford Trueblood. My mother's maiden name is Trueblood.

KT: What kind of name is that, Trueblood?

BD: Oh . . .

KT: Do you know?

BD: Well, it's just a regular American name, I guess. (Laughs)

KT: Well, anyway, tell me a little bit more about your grandmother.

BD: My grandmother, well, was very nice and we respected her very much, and she was good to us. I was very, I was young when she died. I guess I was about twelve years old, maybe twelve years old, maybe not. But anyway up until her death, she was a wonderful person. She looked after us. When my uncle and all of them had to go to work, well, she was always home. I've never known her to work because her son took care of her and the rest of the kids contributed to her support. And he had a house and made a home for her in his home, after his father died. Now I don't know what year my grandfather died, (because) I never knew him. He was dead before I--I don't know if he was dead before I was born--but anyway I know I never remembered him.

And I never remember my grandmother on my dad's side. My grandfather died since I've been over here, on my dad's side. Now, he was a very nice person. I never was close to him because after my father died, I guess, the in-laws kind of get to themselves, so I never was real close to my grandfather on my dad's side. But I knew him, I'd go visit him. I remember my sister and I used to go and visit with him. And my aunt on my dad's side, her name was Anna, and she would always cook this good food for us when we'd go there, you know, and feed us real good.

KT: What kind of house did they live in?

BD: My--just a frame house. It wasn't anything elaborate, but they had it fixed up nice. It was clean. And my aunty raised chickens and she had a couple of pigs in the back. And they'd kill these pigs and they'd give us a piece of pork and chickens and things like that. So it was real nice.

KT: Did they live in the country?

BD: Yes.

KT: You said they have pigs and things like that.

BD: Yes.

KT: They didn't live right in New Orleans town.

BD: No, they didn't live down in New Orleans. They lived in the country.

KT: And then you would go out in the car?

BD: Yes, my mother used to drive us out there.

KT: Oh! You folks had a car then?

BD: Yes. Well my . . .

KT: Was that typical at that time?

BD: Well, my mother had an old car. I don't know, it must have been a T-model Ford because it had a box top. But she used to drive this car and she would take us out to see my grandfather once in a while and also my aunty. And it was real nice.

KT: Would the car crank?

BD: Yes, you had to crank the car up.

KT: And was it exciting to go in it?

BD: Oh, yes. I just loved it. (Chuckles) We didn't get in it too often 'cause that was for to go to church. You went to church in that car.

KT: And then when she went to work, she wouldn't drive her car?

BD: Caught the bus.

KT: There was a bus system in New Orleans at that time that was [working] . . .

BD: Yes, we had streetcars.

KT: Oh.

BD: Streetcars before they got, they got all buses now, but we had streetcars.

KT: Oh, with tracks?

BD: With tracks, yes. Trolley cars, they call them. And that thing was up on that electric wire. That's the thing that ran the car. They'd run long on that electric wire and they'd be on the track. Say the neutral ground. That's where the cars ran.

KT: And then how much would it cost to ride?

BD: At that time I was in New Orleans, it was seven cents to ride the bus, I mean the car. And now they got all buses, they got a couple of cars there that they keep just for the tourist attraction, they have a couple of cars there. But most of them are buses now.

KT: And then how much would gas have been at those times? Can you remember at all?

BD: No, I don't know what it--must have been about two cents, I guess. (Laughs)

KT: It's unreasonable, I tell you. So then how much do you figure your family could live on at that time? The three children and your mom, a week or a month?

BD: Oh, I imagine was very little because food was very cheap at that time. I remember in New Orleans, you could go to the butcher shop and get fifteen cents worth of pork chops and get about four or five chops. And you could go and get a nickel worth of sugar and a nickel worth of coffee, and you'd have coffee for two or three days and sugar for two or three days. So, food was cheap at that time, very cheap.

KT: And then your mail was delivered to the house, just like today, or you would have to go to the post office.

BD: No, mail was delivered to the house.

KT: Interesting. Okay, so then, we'll jump now, we'll jump back up to Hawai'i. You came over here [in 1944], and what was your first impression--how did you get here? I think you first mentioned before you were on the boat and you had to wait for a convoy or something?

BD: I came on a boat and we was on the water eleven days and nights, and we were in a convoy. And I came on the USS Philipia. And when [i.e., before] I got here, we were in a storm for two or three days and nights, and you had to tie yourself in the bunk because that water was coming. You'd go to the dining room to eat breakfast or

lunch or dinner and you'd get one of them big lurches and the food [would] go all (over) on the floor and, it was just horrible. And they had sodas on the boat at that time, and there was a fella had got these sodas, I guess this was his little hobby. And he was selling them for fifty cents. But water and things got so low on the ship, till he gave us sodas and things to put in our stateroom. Well, it wasn't a stateroom, it was just a room. And we had this, some type of liquid to drink. But it was rough, and when I got here, it was raining, like a rainy day like today, and when the ship docked, all these people, the local people would come down and meet the ship.

KT: I see.

BD: And they were standing there with no shoes on. And I said, "Oh, Lord, we came to a place where we can't buy shoes!" But it wasn't that. The local people at that time, I don't know if they still do it, but when I would go to work, and we had rain, everybody pulled off their shoes and stuck them in their coat. And you know, it taught me something, because we'd wade through the water in our shoes, we didn't pull them off. But they did that to keep from breaking their shoes down. And it taught me something. So, many times, I was out there at Barber's Point and we were in water up to here. (BD indicates the depth of the water.)

KT: How much was that? Up till the middle of your leg?

BD: Yes. Lot of time we had to wade through water like that because the drainage was so poor out there. And I got to the place where I took off my shoes too, my shoes and stockings, and wade through the water and then get inside, get an old rag, dry your feet, and put your shoes back on. And so, that taught me a lot of breaking your shoes down, instead of wading through the water in them. But they pull off their shoes the minute when it start raining.

KT: Can you tell me a little bit more about the ship? Were there segregated conditions on the ship or not?

BD: Well, I'll tell you, it evidently was, because it were four of us Blacks [who] came over together and we were all was in one stateroom. You know, they had four bunks in there, two up and down. And that's where we were, in that. So it had to be, because we wasn't with any Whites, I didn't see any Whites with Blacks.

KT: And then when you ate, would you eat, everyone together?

BD: Oh, yes. They didn't have no separate room to eat. We all ate together.

KT: And then when you came, who met you at the boat?

BD: My husband [Nathaniel Dunson].

KT: Oh. And he already had his lodging?

BD: He had his place. He had rented a house out in Pearl City. And that's where we stayed. And in the mornings we had to travel through a taro patch, only little trails to get to the station where the train stopped there.

KT: The train?

BD: Yes. See, we rode the train to work because you couldn't buy a car.

KT: Wait now. You rode the train from Pearl City to . . .

BD: To Barber's Point.

KT: . . . to Barber's Point. So when you came, you immediately had a job at Barber's Point.

BD: Oh, yes. Yes, you have a job when you get---well, when I was in Vallejo, when I was on my way over here, you have a job there waiting for you and work every day if you want to. You didn't get paid there, but your pay was here when you got here. And, but you had a job, you could [work] every day. I worked in the shipyard there in Vallejo, Vallejo Shipyard. And we went to work every morning and came back every evening. We were living in a dormitory.

KT: How long did you stay in Vallejo?

BD: I stayed in Vallejo about two weeks. Uh huh [yes], two or three weeks.

KT: And then they had big dormitories, and then the workers would stay there . . .

BD: Yes, big dormitories and we all stayed there. I had a room to myself.

KT: And then what kind of work would you do on the shipyard?

BD: Well, I went down there and I was working as a, well, I don't know what you called it, but anyway, it was cleaning the ship up, chipping the thing. I was running one of the machines where you take all the rust off the ship. All that. And they paid good for it. Now, my pay started when I left New Orleans. See, they paid you so much per diem while traveling.

KT: So you traveled on the train across the [country] . . .

BD: Uh huh [yes], from New Orleans on the train to Vallejo.

KT: And did you have a friend that came with you or you were by yourself?

BD: No, I was by myself. I happened to meet a friend that was traveling, [he] had been to New Orleans to visit his relatives. His name was CJ. And I met him there and when we got off, he told me, he said, "Don't get off the [train] in Vallejo, get off in Los Angeles."

I said, "No, I don't know anybody in Los Angeles. I'm not getting off in Los Angeles."

He said, "No, I'm going to take you home with me."

And he did. And his family was very nice. He had two aunts there. They had a beautiful home. And we went to see Duke Ellington that night, and it was outstanding. He took me out for the night to the nightclub, and it was lovely. And then he brought me back to Vallejo to the dormitories. And so then, I met these other three girls that was there and so we were kind of palled around until we got here. And when they [the military] got ready to bring us here, we weren't to tell anybody where we were going when we left Vallejo. They came down in a bus, and we boarded that bus about 4:30 in the morning [in 1944]. And they're taking us to San Francisco. And before daylight, they backed that bus right down to the [wharf], where you load on the ship, and we was loaded on the ship and that was it. We talked to nobody, we said nothing to anybody, and we just boarded that ship for Hawai'i.

KT: The secrecy was due to the war?

BD: Yes, due to the war. Yes.

KT: And they were afraid the Japanese were gonna--no, that was . . .

BD: Yes. No, they were afraid the Japanese would bomb--well, the reason why they travel in convoys with the ship, they was afraid that they [Japanese] had submarines, enemy subs and things, you know, travelling in that water. And this is why they--and they zigzagged. They didn't come straight. Because it just takes a few hours for a ship to get from here to the Main[land]--I think it's about four, or four hours or six hours, or something like that.

KT: No, four or five days.

BD: Yes--huh?

KT: To get from here to the Mainland?

BD: Uh huh.

KT: No, four or five days.

BD: Four or five days on the ship. Well, anyway, it wasn't eleven days. See, they zigzagged in order to throw the enemies off if in case there was any. At least, that's what they told us.

KT: Were you scared? Was it a scary feeling not knowing what might happen?

BD: I guess I didn't have sense enough to be scared. I was just so happy that I was coming over here to my husband, I guess I didn't have sense enough. And he had rented a big house. It was a four-bedroom house and it was a nice house because it was a Japanese home that they had bought and at that time, it was near that power plant in Pearl City. We lived near that power plant. So the Japanese people could not live in their homes there.

KT: What?

BD: Because they was afraid that the Japanese would probably bomb the power plant or something. It was too close to the power plant. And they had to, they'd come home and take their bath and eat their food, and then they had to live across that taro patch, I don't know where, but they had to live somewhere else. They couldn't live in their homes there.

KT: I thought that was only on the Mainland that they had the yellow peril scare.

BD: No, no.

KT: They had it here too?

BD: Oh, I don't know about any concentration camp, but I know the Japanese could not live in their home because they would--we rented their home from them. And they would come home and take their bath and that was the first time I knew that they had this outside bath and they would go in there together. They didn't worry about, they'd just take off their clothes and walk. And one lady that we rented a room to, she saw them, she said, "Oh, look at all these naked people." But they didn't pay any attention to her and after then, they started wrapping the towel around, but before then, they didn't. And they'd drop in their sauna, and take their sauna bath. And then . . .

KT: It was very natural, the bathing process with them was very natural for them.

BD: Yes, because they all used the same water, because it's hot and everything, and then they'd go across the taro patch, way on the other side, and that's where they slept.

KT: Was it in a house, you figure? [It] must have been a house.

BD: Oh, it was a house, but this was a nice home and we could have bought it and didn't. And it was nice. And then we moved from after, see, we stayed there until we [were on] a list [for] a house in CHA2 [Civilian Housing Area 2]. And we stayed on the list until we got a house and as soon as the house was available, we moved to

CHA2.

KT: Tell me a little bit about CHA2 now.

BD: Now, CHA2, it was segregated, too. The Blacks had a certain street and the Whites were in the rest of them. I think they had two streets for Blacks. And that was Ninth Street and Tenth, I think, Nine and Ten, I think that was. And then in 1946, they moved us from there because these homes was built for military. So the war was over, and so they moved us from CHA2 to CHA3. And we stayed there until '51 and then that's when I bought my home in Wai'anae and we moved to Wai'anae July of 1951.

KT: Well, now what was the difference between CHA2 and CHA3?

BD: They had the same homes, but they said that they was going to put all military in CHA2 and all civilians in CHA3. And that's why we moved, and we had Seventeenth and Nineteenth Street in CHA3. That's where all the Blacks lived.

KT: And then, how many Blacks were there and they were all civilians?

BD: Yes, they were all civilians.

KT: And about how many Blacks were living there, would you say?

BD: Those whole two streets were filled up. It was, I would say, my God, I would say at least maybe a hundred people was there, a hundred families was there.

KT: And then was there any kind of social life, any clubs, or what?

BD: Oh, yes, they had social clubs at that time, the Lords of the Manor. And they had other social clubs, but I don't remember the names of them, but, anyway, there was a lot of socializing. People did a lot of socializing in their homes.

KT: So would [you] have dinner or cards or [what]?

BD: We played cards and we'd have gatherings, socials, cookouts and what have you. It was real nice there. I enjoyed it while I was there.

KT: And was there was a feeling of resentment that people were segregated, or it didn't matter?

BD: Well, we knew we were segregated, but I guess it just, oh, they spoke about it a lot, but it wasn't anything done about it.

KT: But who spoke about it?

BD: Well, the neighborhood people did, but it wasn't anything done about it. We stayed, that was until I moved out of there. And then during that time, when I moved out, shortly after I moved out, they

were asking the civilian people to move out because they were turning it all into military.

KT: And then in terms of your contacts with local people, living over there, you worked with local people . . .

BD: Yes.

KT: . . . so that's how you made contacts?

BD: That's how I made contacts with local people. I worked with all races. At first it wasn't. I think the first Japanese who came aboard at Barber's Point was in 1949. I don't know about the other bases. And that was, I don't think more than about three came aboard at that time, but they had the Filipinos, the Puerto Ricans, and Portuguese, and all other races of people, Chinese and everything, was working in the government jobs at that time, except the Japanese people. The Japanese people was the last ones to come in at Barber's Point, now I don't know about the other bases because I had no contact with them. I had friends that was working there, but I don't know.

KT: Then, what about the Hawaiian people?

BD: Oh, Hawaiian people worked at the base, too, but they had more of the other races of people than they did of the Hawaiians.

KT: Did you feel that the Hawaiians were discriminated against?

BD: Well, not really. I didn't feel that they were discriminated against. Now, maybe in later years, they have been discriminated against but at that time, I never had any thought about whether they were discriminated against or not. I just assumed that they didn't apply for the jobs or they didn't want to work because. . . . Well, I won't say that. (Chuckles)

KT: Okay well, we'll stop on this side of the tape here.

BD: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

BD: . . . there weren't too many Dunsons. It was a Haole fellow [who] came over here from Texas one year. And he is a Dunson, spells his name exactly like we do. And he called our number when he looked in the phone book. He called our number and he invited us down for dinner at the Hawaiian Village, and he was so filthy with money, you could smell it, one of them oil men. And he says, "I'm related to you people." (KT laughs.)

And my husband says, "No, I don't think you are because you sound Caucasian."

He say, "I am Caucasian."

He said, "Well, I'm very much Black."

He said, "I don't give a damn what you are." He said, "There isn't very many Dunsons. Everywhere I go, I look in the phone book, and when I find one, I contact them." He says, "Somewhere down the line we were related."

You know some of them is very fair and then some of them, oh, don't let them touch them, you know, that they are mixed with Black, but they got a lot of Whites that are mixed with Blacks and you got a lot of Blacks that are mixed with Whites.

KT: Yes, well that's nice that he would be open-minded like that . . .

BD: Yes. He was very open-minded. And he invited us down, had a very nice time, and everything. And one of these Black women was in California, I think he said, and his father put her in the will. Now, I guess the old man died before he got to us, I don't know, we (haven't) heard from him since. (Laughs)

KT: Well then, what kind of name do you think Dunson is?

BD: I don't know.

KT: You've never tried to investigate it.

BD: No, I have never tried.

KT: English, or Spanish or . . .

BD: But I know at one time we were the only Dunson for a long, long time and then they had a military man came over here, and his name was Dunson. And when he met us, he say, "I don't hear that name too often," and he wanted to [know] where we came from. But that's his name. You see, I just got it by marriage. My maiden name is Elliott, E-L-L-I-O-T-T.

KT: Elliott.

BD: Mm hmm.

KT: Well, Trueblood?

BD: Trueblood is my mother's maiden name.

KT: Mother's maiden name.

BD: And she married an Elliott. So we became Elliotts.

KT: My friend that lives in Wai'anae here that I just was talking to [you] about is an Elliott, curious isn't it. Anyway, we won't get on that now. While we're on the tape, we'll continue. Maybe you could speak to me a little bit more about the relations between the Blacks and locals and then between the various ethnics groups here that you observed back in that period of time. Because on the Mainland, as I recall, it was a period still of segregation and people having certain hostile attitudes.

BD: Mm hmm. Yes.

KT: Was this a total different place to be? What did you feel about it and what did you observe?

BD: Well, I didn't feel anything because I never come in contact with where I couldn't go, or something I couldn't do. I have never been turned down at a nightclub or anything like that. We went where we wanted to go. And the places probably where they would turn me down, I didn't want to go. I wanted to go to the better classes of places. And I was never turned down at any of them. I [we] went to any club we wanted to and was never turned down. Of course, we patronized the military clubs quite a bit. We were able to go to all the clubs. We had cards, just like military persons did. Everybody didn't have that, but if you were in a certain pay scale, you could get a card from the military to go to the military clubs, and we went to the military clubs an awful lot. Schofield, Hickam, Shafter, Barber's Point, to most of all, and down here in Poka'i Bay, they have a military club down there, and we used to go there all the time.

So, and in my neighborhood in Wai'anae when I (moved) there in '51, I [we] was the only Black there for, well, when I moved, I didn't know of any Blacks living, not in that particular neighborhood. I lived on McArthur Street, and I had Japanese friends, and oh, Hawaiian friends, Portuguese friends, Haole friends, I had all kinds of friends and we [BD and her husband] were a party people. We gave parties every weekend, and we had a houseful. All the Schofield Barracks guys would come. We had about, I guess, six or eight of those guys [who] would come and their wives and then the neighborhood people. Right across the street from [us] was a Chinese-Portuguese family and right on this [right] side of me was a Hawaiian family and on this [left] side of me was a Japanese married to a Filipino, and on the other side of him was Japanese and he was the postmaster at that time. Larry Kamada, Larry Kamada, yes, he was the postmaster at that time, so we got along just fine. Had no complaints, they went in my house, and when I wanted to go to their house, I was in their house, which I didn't visit very much because I worked every day. But whenever I had a few minutes to spare, I would run into their house, but most of them would come to my house because they were home all day playing, and I was at work and when I get through with my dinner and things, then we'd congregate over there at my place. But it was real nice.

In fact, I had better relations with the neighbors in Wai'anae, than I do here. Because, here, I got good neighbors, and I know them, but we don't get together like we did in Wai'anae. But they all are very nice. These people across here, the Akanas, well, we used to go to parties, but I guess there's a time in everybody's life, [when] they kind of slow down. We used to have parties over here all the time, they would come. And the Williams over here, which is Hawaiians, and these people here never did socialize, they're strictly homebodies, the Holsteins. But the rest of them, we'd get together once in a while, but, now, we don't get together too much, I guess, everybody, and now they're all working and I'm at home. So, I see them when they come in, we out there in the yard working, it's "hi" this and "hi" that, and that's about the height of the neighborhood visit. But, as I say, I never was a visitor anyway.

KT: Would you have music at your parties?

BD: Oh, (yes), we had music.

KT: What kind of music would you have?

BD: Well, we had records, we played records, and once in a while you'd get a little combo, a group that come in, which was local people. They had that Puerto Rican guy that used to play the drums, and the others played their instruments and the ukuleles and the guitars, and what have you. And my next-door neighbor, that we called "Ma Helen," well, they all were musically inclined and played the ukulele and the guitar and did the hula. And I took up hula and my daughter [Walter Bea] took up hula. She graduated in hula and used to teach hula. But I don't fool with it anymore. It's been many years. I never was a good hula dancer but I could do the hula.

KT: And your daughter taught where?

BD: She taught here and back on the Mainland.

KT: Hmm.

BD: In Wai'anae. She took it from my next-door neighbor. He was a teacher.

KT: And he had a <u>hālau</u>?

BD: He taught hula, and also his sister Helen taught hula. And I took it from her, but Bea took it from [Helen's brother].

KT: And who were her students on the Mainland?

BD: Oh, I don't know her girls that was on the Mainland, all of her different . . .

KT: So, your daughter would pull more just to being local?

BD: Huh?

KT: Would your daughter feel that she was Black or would she feel that she was local?

BD: Oh, no, she felt she was Black. She couldn't be anything else but Black. (Chuckles)

KT: But she never encountered any problems . . .

BD: No.

KT: . . . being Black out here . . .

BD: No, no.

KT: . . . and going to school or anything like that.

BD: No, went to school, and her friends, that's how I met my friends, is through my daughter's schoolmates. And they all congregated at my house, stayed overnight, and I met the families. And then when she had to stay overnight with them, we would drive her to their home and then I'd get a chance to meet their parents, and this is how I become very acquainted with her friends' parents. And Danny Kihano, you know, the Speaker of the House [State House of Representatives] down there? He graduated a year ahead of my daughter.

KT: Oh.

BD: Yes. They all went to Waipahu High School.

KT: I see. Oh, she didn't go to high school out here? She went to Waipahu.

BD: Well, there wasn't no high schools out here then.

KT: Oh.

BD: It wasn't no (high) schools out here. And wasn't no buses running out here. And we had a jitney running out here that would take us back and forth to town for a dollar, dollar round-trip. And now, she had to go to Waipahu, and it was a bus, a lady had a bus, and she rented that. Her daughters used to drive that bus and pick up the kids and take them to Waipahu and bring them back. So, it wasn't any (high) school for her to go to out here.

KT: I see.

BD: Uh huh.

KT: We take that for granted, yeah?

BD: Now, like Wai'anae High School, and all the other schools were built

since she graduated.

KT: I see. So then, did she grow up with a sense of Black culture or just local culture being growing up here from the time she was a girl.

BD: I guess she just grew up just with a group of people. It wasn't, well, she had no Blacks to socialize with. She didn't, she--for a number of years, she was the only Black going to that school outside of the Wagner family that was half Black and half Hawaiian. She went to school with them. But it wasn't any pure Blacks out here like her, 100 percent Black. So . . .

KT: Well, it . . .

BD: . . . she had no choice. All of her friends was local people.

KT: That's a fine line anyway, 100 percent Black when you speak of all the different categories that exist on the Mainland, then, you know, it seems like it's hard, it's just a category . . .

BD: (Yes), and when she went to school in CHA3, there, well, there was all kinds of people going, White, Black, and all, they were all mixed up because the military children went to the same school she went to.

KT: What kind of work did you do at Barber's Point?

BD: I was working in the technical section as a librarian. And librarian, I wasn't a librarian like Downtown Honolulu's librarian. We had, oh, I guess I had books from here (indicates the size), all the way around. But it was to get parts for the planes and the different equipment that was there. And that was my job to look up these--if somebody come (in) and wanted a part, I had to look up that part and get a stock number for them in order for them to order their material, and so this is what I did there.

KT: So did you learn about machines and planes and things just by working with all of those things [catalogues and parts]?

BD: Yes, right, right.

KT: That's interesting.

BD: And then when I first come here, I made airplane wings and flaps for the airplane.

KT: At Barber's Point?

BD: At Barber's Point. And you'd be surprised what they were made of, nothing but unbleached muslin!

KT: What?

BD: We covered (the metal) with unbleached muslin, and what they did was a rib stitch to--it was a piece of metal laid down, and you covered it with [muslin]--the girls upstairs sewed this thing on the machine, a high-powered machine, and then you put it on there, and then you'd have to rib stitch it. One girl is on one side and one girl (on the other side). We had needles about this long (indicates about one foot long), and I'd poke this needle--they'd put the holes where you supposed to sew. And you poked that needle through there and find that hole and she'd pull it out on that side and she'd send it back to you and back and forth, and it was criss-crossing. Then after we did that, after we covered it with that material, then they sent it to what they call a dope shop and they put the dope on it. It was was white thick stuff, it's just like a glue or something. But when they got through with it, it was hard as a board. And then they painted it whatever color that plane was and put it on there.

KT: Interesting.

BD: Yes.

KT: So, you did that initially, and then you went to the library taking care of that whole section. And then you worked there up until the time of your retirement?

BD: I worked in the library up until my retirement in 1976.

KT: And then, in terms of your many, many social activities, you've been very active in the community, maybe you could speak to me a bit about all of those things that you did. When you first came, you didn't belong to any groups did you, or did you bring some of your membership with you?

BD: No, no. Well, the Eastern Star was set up here in 1949. I'm a chartered member of it. And the Wai Wai Nui, a social club, was started about twenty-five, twenty-six years ago, or twenty-seven years ago, something like that. I think we celebrated our twenty-sixth, or twenty-seventh anniversary last year in November. And I'm a chartered member of that.

KT: What is the---no, let's first do the Eastern Star. What is the Eastern Star?

BD: Eastern Star is a secret organization. And you become a member of it if your husband or your father (or brother) is a Mason in good standing. Otherwise, you can't become a member.

KT: I see. So, it's a family [organization].

BD: It's a family deal. You can only come under male. And that's your husband, your father or your brother or your son.

KT: And then there's instruction?

BD: Oh, yes, we have our books--book of instructions and our rituals and what have you.

KT: Is it . . .

BD: But it's just for the members. It's not for anybody else to see.

KT: Mm hmm. And would you say, is it religious?

BD: It's very religious. Very religious. Very religious. And we have meetings twice a month, first Monday and the third Monday of every month.

KT: And it's something that you belong to for your life?

BD: Oh, yes. As long as you pay your dues. You have to pay your dues in order to stay in just about anything, now. And as long as you pay your dues and stay in good standing, and what they mean by good standing is paying your dues. Well, I mean, we try to get the best in other words. Because it's an organization that you don't want anybody in that is going to be derogatory or anything like that, so we try to get the best.

KT: So, in other words, there's certain values and principles that are associated with it . . .

BD: That's right.

KT: . . . that are high?

BD: Yes.

KT: And then, does it have an aim? I mean . . .

BD: Oh, yes. We give scholarships to kids and we help the community like giving Thanksgiving baskets, Christmas baskets, or helping less fortunate families. And the same thing applies to the Wai Wai Nui. We give Thanksgiving baskets, we give Christmas baskets, we give scholarships, we help the Black Teenage Pageant, and also the Eastern Star helps the Black Teenage Pageant. And we all donate to that. So, we're constantly helping the community. And I work with the Red Cross. I'm a volunteer for them. I'm a volunteer for the Cancer Fund. I got one out there now, I'm going to ask you to give me a donation. (Laughs)

KT: Okay.

BD: And I work with my church. I'm . . .

KT: Which church is that?

BD: That is Wai'anae United Methodist (Church). And I'm a member of the UMW, which is the United Methodist Women. Well, Sunday we will

perform. The UMW will take over the church service for Sunday. And I'm only taking part in it. I will take up the collection. And the rest of them will do the other part of it. Like they will deliver a message and sing. And I'll join in singing, too, which I don't have any voice to sing. But I'll be up there opening my mouth like I am singing, because I'm not a singer and I'm not a speaker. (Chuckles) And I'm a . . .

KT: Speaking suits you well.

BD: . . . and I'm a past matron of the Eastern Star and I'm the president now of the Wai Wai Nui. And I'll be glad when this year is over so I can step down. (Chuckles)

KT: Well, now, the Wai Wai Nui is more of a social club . . .

BD: That's a social club.

KT: It was established . . .

BD: And it has--well, our goal is sixteen members. We don't have quite sixteen now, but that's what we have in there. We started off with sixteen Black women.

KT: And it was--instead of going out and join another social club, why was there a need felt to have a Black women's social club?

BD: Well, we don't have one here. We didn't have one here. And I think it's a need, for every other group has their clubs. So we started one for the Black women. And that's what we have is Black women. So far we don't have anybody else in there but Black. Now, I don't know if they'll change that eventually or not. It has been spoken of, but so far, we haven't come to any conclusion on that.

KT: Well now, you mentioned before that the Eastern Star was integrated. Did it start out when you first joined here? Was it an integrated group?

BD: Yes, it was an integrated group--well, the men was integrated. And we started out with an integrated group. We had Chinese, we had Puerto Ricans, we had Hawaiians, and I think that's about all. Portuguese, Hawaiian, and Chinese, and Puerto Ricans.

KT: And that's a very old group, the Masons, is it not?

BD: Oh, yes.

KT: How old would you say?

BD: Oh, I think--Daddy, how old is the Mason? Over 100 years old? Yes, it's an old organization.

KT: And the same teachings come down through each generation, the same

teachings.

BD: Yes.

KT: And is there something you would say about the character of people that belong to that group which would make them distinguishable from--I mean, what is it? I mean, I understand you said it's a secret organization so you can't really talk about it, but just in terms of--what makes one want to be a part of it or?

BD: Well, the only way you can be a part of it, is whatever the men are. That's what we get. We can only get their wives or their sisters or their mothers. That's all we can get. You see, say you wanted to be a member of the Eastern Star and your husband is not a Mason, or father wasn't a Mason, well, you couldn't be an Eastern Star. So, the men are supposed to be upright and good men. So, we assume that their wives come up to their standard. So, that is how they are selected.

KT: So, has your daughter become one too?

BD: Yes, my daughter is an Eastern Star.

KT: And then, your daughter, do you see her? Does she come?

BD: My daughter lives here with me, but she's just a workaholic that I only see her now on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. She drives the school bus every day in the week, five days a week. And she works at the Shower Tree five days a week. And her only two days off at the Shower Tree--two nights off--is Tuesday night and Wednesday night. She stays down there. It's at the airport. It's like a mini-hotel. Say, the stewardess, some people that is coming in here is having a layover for four hours and they don't want to go down there [Honolulu] and get a hotel room for eighty or ninety dollars, they can go to the Shower Tree and take a shower and sleep for that four hours for--all together she say with the tax and everything it's nineteen [dollars] something. So this is what it is.

KT: But you have to be an airline employee to . . .

BD: No, you don't have to be an airline employee. Say you had come over here on a trip and you had a four-hour layover, and you didn't want to get a hotel room and you knew about the Shower Tree, you would go there and ask them, and if they had room, they will give you bed, and you get your shower, and sleep for those four hours and you would pay them that nineteen dollars and something with the tax.

KT: Well, that's good to know. The Shower Tree.

BD: Yes. Uh huh.

KT: So then, now, this daughter, does she have children?

BD: That's her three boys that I'm talking about.

KT: And then, her other two boys are grown up already?

BD: Yeah, they're grown up and have families. The youngest boy [Lovell] have two kids. The second boy [Rico] have four. And her oldest boy [Paris] have three.

KT: All boys?

BD: All boys, she had no girls. She had three boys. I had. . . .

KT: Yeah, and they had all boys.

BD: No, Lovell have two girl, and Rico has three girls and one boy, And Paris have three boys. And Paris is my adopted son. That's the adopted, that's her oldest boy.

KT: So, all toll [total] . . .

BD: Rico is her second.

KT: How many live here? Of her sons . . .

BD: All of them.

KT: All three of them.

BD: All of them live here

KT: I see.

BD: All three of them.

KT: And so, you see them with some regularity?

BD: Oh, I see them every day, uh huh, every day.

KT: They live on the Wai'anae Coast?

BD: Rico lives in Wai'anae. Lovell lives here with me. And Paris lives in Wai'anae Valley. Mm hmm.

KT: Well, let me think. Are there other things? In terms of stereotypes about Blacks, have you run into any of those since you have been here, generalized, usually negative attitudes about Blacks that people have held or have ever asked you about that you can recall?

BD: No. . . .

KT: Do people ever mistake you for being just local?

BD: Oh, I have been mistaken lots of time for local, but I usually let them know what I am, because I don't see any advantage to it at all, you know. They'll say you'll make a good Hawaiian, well, who the hell want to be Hawaiian? That's what I say. I don't see where they got any more than what I have. They aren't doing any better than I am, and it's not your race that count it's what you (are) . . .

KT: Who you are.

BD: (Yes). Who you are and what you do with it. That's the way--that's just like working. It's not how much money you make, it's what you do with it after you get it.

KT: Can you think of any other areas that you would like to share in terms of your experiences either here or in New Orleans, in terms of comparing your experiences?

BD: Well, I've lived here longer than I've lived anywhere else and I have a little more experience here than I have on the Mainland because on the Mainland, after I was grown, as I say when my sister and I were grown, we worked and taken care of my mother and set her down, and all we wanted when we came home was a hot meal, and that's what she had for us. And as far as social life [in Louisiana], it wasn't too much social life. We went out on the weekend and had a nice time with our friends, but most of it was spent around the house. Until after I was married and had my place and my sister had hers. My mother had her own place by that time, she had her own home and so she still lives in that same house now.

KT: Would you say your husband has experienced a similar positive experience being here? Did he encounter any difficulties or any particular positive aspects that would be different from what you encountered, being here in the Islands?

BD: I don't think so. I don't think so. He got along with everybody and had loads of friends. He knew everybody. He was a fun guy when he was well [BD's husband recently had a stroke], and everybody knew him and everybody liked him, as far as I know, and he had loads of friends of all races, all races of people. Sometimes we had more Haoles in our house than we had anything else. But that was his friends, and I have always accepted his friends and so, we got along very well in that area. And in the church, at one time, we were the only Blacks in there, but we got along very well with the church [members]. And I still get along very well with them. We have our social life there and fundraising like we have huli-huli chicken and we sell the tickets and I get out there on the highway and holler, "Huli-huli chickens," and stop the traffic and they come in and they buy. And so wherever I can help out in that way, I do.

KT: What made you decide to stay, finally? When did you come to a decision, or did it just sort of happen?

BD: It just sort of happened. I came over here for eighteen months. See, that was supposed to be the deal with the government, eighteen months or until the duration of war. And after the war was over, we could have gone back. The government would have sent us back, but by that time, I guess we had decided to stay here. My husband wanted to stay here and so quite naturally, I did too. And the government would send us back every two years. We could go back on the government, all expenses paid, and visit our families and friends, and up until we retired and then the contract was over. See, we came over on the contract.

KT: When did you start to having your children?

BD: Oh, I had my daughter before I came over here.

KT: I see.

BD: Uh huh.

KT: Oh, I didn't know.

BD: I had my daughter before I came over here. She came over here in 1947, I think it was.

KT: Did she come by herself?

BD: No, a friend of mine, Mrs. Butler, which is dead now, she came back with her. She had gone home on a vacation. And she brought her back.

KT: And who had your daughter until then?

BD: My sister.

KT: I see, so you are close?

BD: My sister and my mother.

KT: And then, your daughter came on the boat, too?

BD: No, by plane at that time. (Chuckles)

KT: Well, now, when did the air service start to get regular?

BD: Well, I think it was in 1946 and '47.

KT: Right after the war?

BD: Mm hmm, yes.

KT: And then, there was no fear about that. It was just easy and you just did that?

BD: Mm hmm [yes].

KT: And then when did you have your other two sons?

BD: I didn't have any more kids.

KT: Oh, your daughter is the only one. And she is the one that had . . .

BD: She's the one that had the three sons, but I adopted one of her sons--the oldest boy, yes.

KT: And you didn't have kids because you felt one would be enough or you were. . . .

BD: Well, no, I wanted more kids but I just didn't have any more. And I didn't do anything to stop it because there wasn't such a thing as pills at that time. I didn't know anything about protecting--well, I didn't know anything on the market that was for protection at that time.

KT: That's different.

BD: Uh huh.

KT: Nowadays with things available at the store . . .

BD: (Yes). You know, years ago you didn't hear about birth control pills and all this stuff when I was coming along. So, I never even thought of that. Just didn't have any more. And when I had that one, the doctor told me I wouldn't have any more.

KT: I see, so you . . .

BD: But, I had doctors that tell me, I guess they was just taking my money, "Oh, you can have kids," so I went taking all kinds of treatment. I ain't got none yet. So, I know I ain't gonna get none now.

(Laughter)

KT: So, has your sister been over to visit you?

BD: Oh, yes. My sister, my mother, too. My mother has been over here about, oh, I guess she made about six trips over here. She was here about two years ago. And my sister has been over here about five or six times. We went to the other island, to Kaua'i, and so . . .

KT: And what kinds of contrast does she notice between where she lives in New Orleans and how it is here?

BD: She likes it here, but I guess because she have her business back there, she can't make the move. But I think she would like to come

here with my mother, but my mother won't budge. She's (going) stay in New Orleans. And my sister (won't) budge without my mother. So that's--and then as I say, she got her business there. She's in the grocery store business.

KT: I see. She has a grocery store?

BD: Mm hmm [yes]. Had it for the last forty years.

KT: Well, again. Was she an unusual person? I mean, she's a woman and she's a Black woman and she had her own business in the South?

BD: Yes.

KT: She was an unusual woman or that was a common thing?

BD: I'll tell you what happened now. As I say, she worked in Rex Manufacturing Company many more years than I did because she had the job first, then she finally got me a job there years later. But her husband went to service when the war broke out and he was in New Guinea. And he was a gambler from way back, very lucky. And whenever he would make it big in gambling, he would send that money to her, and she would sink it in the bank. And with her salary, she sunk that. And when he came home for good, when he got out of the service, they went into business where they (are) now, [they] bought that place. And went into business and been in business ever since. And as I say, that's been forty-some years ago.

KT: Isn't that something. What kind of a grocery store is it?

BD: Oh, all kinds of foods, you know. Just like any other supermarket.

KT: And, it's a neighborhood kind of store?

BD: Uh huh, yes.

KT: Kind of like one of the bigger grocery stores that would be out here? That kind of thing?

BD: Yes.

KT: That would service that particular community.

BD: But all the community don't buy from her, you know how we are. We rather go to the other supermarkets because they say the Whites have fresher vegetables than the Blacks and all. But she's got a good trade, but she doesn't get everybody in that neighborhood.

KT: Well, no one has everyone . . .

BD: (Yes). You know, they patronize. She got good customers. And she's got a good business.

KT: Excellent.

BD: Uh huh.

KT: Well, what does she like about being out here? What does attracts her to the Islands?

BD: Oh, she think that this is just the ideal life to live out here because it's not like Mainland. It isn't as fast as the Mainland. You can take it slow, or you can take it fast, or you can do whatever you want to. And like on the Mainland, most Mainland people, I find, is [are in competition] with the Joneses. The neighbor's doing this, and the neighbor's got this, and you got this and you have to go out and you have to be dressed from head to toe and all this, you know, and it's just a hustle and bustle, I think.

KT: And she appreciates kind of a laid-back, non-competitive. . . .

BD: Well, since she's been working for so long. I guess she figured, well, if she was in a place like this, she could just relax. And she never had any kids. She have two adopted daughters and she have those two kids working for her, plus she has a cousin, a first cousin, working for her. Now, she got a second cousin working for her. It's mostly family.

KT: Yes. Like a lot of businesses out here.

BD: Yes. It's a family deal.

KT: . . . family kind of a thing. Well, I think we can close now. I thank you for your time.

BD: Okay.

KT: We'll just turn off the tape now.

BD: All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

December 1990